programme is organised by the Foreign Service Institute covering India's Foreign Policy, International relations, International Law, Diplomacy, International Economic and Commercial relations, Defence and Security issues, besides training in a Foreign Language (French).

Indian Scientists sent back by US

2092. SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI AKHILESH DAS:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the US has sent back a number of scientists working on various American research projects; if so, the details thereof;

(b) whether the US administration also refused Visas to Indian scientists proposing to visit America in connection with various conferences and other assignments; if so, the details thereof; and

(c) Government's reaction and response thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) Seven scientists belonging to the national Institute of Standards & Technology, USA and one scientist from Argonne National Laboratory, USA were asked to leave the United States. These scientists were from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institute of Science (IIS). The visa application of Dr. Chidambaram, Chairman Atomic Energy Commission, was returned and he was informed that current US visa procedures were under review as a result of India's nuclear tests.

(c) The decision to grant a Visa is a sovereign right of the country concerned. India believes that measures such as denial of Visas undermine the generally accepted principles of free movements of scientists and the universality of science. Government does not agree with any targetted policy of denying visas, particularly those that come in the way of scientific exchange and interaction. Government has taken up this issue with the United States and will continue to pursue it.

Cell for Ayurveda in SAARC Secretariat

2093. SHRI KHAN GHUFRAN ZAHIDI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to set-up a cell for Ayurveda in the SAARC Secretariat; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

Foreign Tours

2094. SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the foreign tours undertaken by different Union Ministers and Ministers of State, indicating the purpose there of, during the last nine months and the expenditure in foriegn exchange and otherwise incurred thereon; and

(b) the comparative figures of expenditure in terms of foreign exchange and otherwise during the corresponding period during the last two years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) and (b) The information is being collected and will be placed on the Table of the House.

Talks with Asean Countries

2095. DR. KARAN SINGH:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether at the last ASEAN (ARF) mee held at Colombo, Laos, Singapore and Vietnan supported India, to justify India's security concerns that led to India conducting N-Test in May this year;

(b) whether Shri Jaswant Singh, the special envoy of the Prime Minister also had meetings with Foreign Ministers of different ASEAN countries, to explain and clarify India's concerns, including those of Russia, China, Japan, UK and USA (Secretary of State); if so, what were their respective responses in this regard; and

(c) what was Government's overall assessment of the ASEAN members and talks relating to India's N-Tests?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Laos, Singapore and Vietnam were among the countries which supported India's stand that the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) should be consistent and view India's nuclear tests from the perspective of the ARF's own responses on this issue, when during 1995-96 other ARF members had conducted nuclear tests.

(b) Shri Jaswant Singh, leader of the Indian delegation, held constructive discussions with Foreign Ministers of ASEAN countries, Russia, China, Japan, UK and USA. Our bilateral and multilateral interaction in the ASEAN and ARF meetings is aimed at leading to a better appreciation of measures taken by India to address international and regional security concerns. Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Primakov reiterated the importance of continued dialogue between India and Russia on all issues and said that Russia was mindful of its close ties with India. Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan reiterated China's historic commitment to good neighbourly and friendly relations with India and stated that recent events and remarks had hurt the feelings of the Chinese people. Shri Jaswant Singh responded that India's valid concerns could not be ignored but ought to be addressed substantively. Japan's State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Masahiko Koumura reiterated Japan's position on nuclear tests and clarified that measures taken by Japan were not meant to contract bilateral relations. The US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright expressed satisfaction with the status of the bilateral dialogue with India and described as positive recent measures announced by India.

(c) India's participation in the Fifty ASEAN Regional Forum provided an opportunity to clarify our policy on nuclear disarmament in the context of the nuclear tests conducted last May. It also demonstrated our continued engagement in the economic and political stability of the region and shared perceptions on regional and international developments. While the ARF Chairman's statement contained a paragraph on the nuclear tests in South Asia, from which we disassociated, we were able to develop a better overall understanding on the part of ASEAN countries of the rationale of our policy.

Hardships to Indian Pilgrims in Pakistan

2096. SHRI SATISHCHANDRA SITARAM PRADHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of hardships and swindling of Indian pilgrims in Pakistan;

(b) whether the Indian embassy is appraised about this situation;

(c) whether Government have lodged protest against behaviour of Pakistani Officials with Indian pilgrims; and

(d) whether Government will consider providing transport arrangements through the Indian embassy in future?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (d) Visits of Indian and Pakistani pilgrims to religious shrines in each other's country are governed by the bilateral Protocol on Visits of Religious Shrines of 1974. During the visits, arrangements for transport, board and lodging are generally made by the host Government.

Indian High Commission officials are deputed to accompany all Indian jathas visiting Pakistan in order to liaise with the local authorities and provide such assistance to the pilgrims as is required. Our Liaison Officers have reported that Pakistani authorities often permit and encourage anti-Indian elements to undertake hostile anti-India propaganda during these visits. Such propaganda and harassment hurts the religious sensibilities of the pilgrims. In some instances, Indian pilgrims also have faced difficulties in respect of board, lodging